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ABSTRACT

A study examined whether rhetorical sensitivity--a goal-directed way of thinking about communication, emphasizing rhetorical invention adapted to both audience and situation--was practiced and useful in supervisory communication. Data were collected from two manufacturing plants, three libraries, and two hospital nursing departments. The first-line supervisors completed measures of their rhetorical sensitivity, while their subordinates and superiors (managers) supplied ratings of satisfaction with supervision. The superiors also rated the leadership qualities of the supervisors. The data showed a significant, positive relationship between supervisors' tendencies toward rhetorical sensitivity and subordinates' satisfaction with supervisors, but not between supervisors' rhetorical sensitivity and their managers' satisfaction with supervisors' performance. There were significant differences across the different organizational settings: rhetorical sensitivity was helpful in a nonunionized manufacturing plant, harmful in an unionized manufacturing plant, and irrelevant in the nursing departments and libraries. The highest average scores for rhetorical sensitivity were recorded by supervisors in the libraries and nursing departments. Overall, the study showed that the concept of rhetorical sensitivity in supervisory communication was determined in large part by organizational situation. (RL)

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Rhetorically Sensitive Supervisory Communication: A Situational Analysis

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Rhetorically Sensitive Supervisory Communication:

A Situational Analysis

On the face of it, the concept of rhetorical sensitivity seems to offer supervisors a useful approach to communication with subordinates. A goal-directed "way of thinking" about communication which emphasizes invention adapted to audience and situation, rhetorical sensitivity was described by Hart and Burks in 1972 as making "effective social interaction manifestly possible."[1] Numerous studies have suggested that the quality of communicative relationships between supervisors and subordinates plays an important role in influencing workers' productivity and job satisfaction.[2] This is particularly true of first-line supervisors, who have been identified repeatedly as occupying a key position in management-worker communiction.[3] Rhetorical sensitivity fits current understandings about how such supervisors should communicate with subordinates in attempting effective managerial leadership.

As long ago as the 50's Tannenbaum and Schmidt argued for adapting managerial leadership to "forces" in the supervisor, in the subordinates, and in the situation. They characterized the successful manager as "one who maintains a high batting average in accurately assessing the forces that determine what his most appropriate behavior at any given time should be and in actually being able to behave accordingly."[4] Similarly, the work of Fiedler, Lawrence and Lorsch, and Hersey and Blanchard suggests a contingency approach to supervisory leadership.[5] Jablin's recent summary of "the state of the art" of superior-subordinate communication research recommends that future research into supervisory communication follow a contingency approach.[6] Jablin's justification of a contingency approach to

research also suggests a rhetorically sensitive approach to actual supervisory communication: "Basically, this contingency approach argues that the qualities of 'effective' superior-subordinate communication varies from situation to situation and is contingent on numerous organizational and interpersonal factors."[7] Hart and Burks seem to be saying much the same thing when they write: "Interpersonal relationships seem to be most productive when situationally-based rhetorical strategies are employed rather than approaches which result from a rigid mind-set."[8] However, research has yet to demonstrate that supervisors who approach communication with their subordinates in a rhetorically sensitive manner are likely to be any more or less effective than supervisors who are less rhetorically sensitive.

To date, the only data regarding rhetorical sensitivity in supervisors was collected by Carlson in connection with his 1978 doctoral study.[9] Carlson administered RHETSEN, a questionnaire designed to assess levels of rhetorical sensitivity, rhetorical reflectorness, and noble selfness, to 537 nursing professionals, including 52 supervisory nurses. Following Darnell and Brockreide, Carlson saw rhetorical reflectors and noble selves as occupying opposite ends of a continuum, with rhetorical sensitives in the middle. Noble selves are self-oriented communicators who pursue control and self-expression, no matter what the situation. As a result, their communication tends to be quite predicable. In contrast, rhetorical reflectors are entirely other-oriented, always deferring to their perceptions of the desires and the needs of others and of the situation. In this sense the communication of rhethorical reflectors also tends to be very predictable. Only rhetorically sensitive communicators combine analysis of personal goals with analysis of the demands of situation and others to make adaptive inventional decisions.

Using RHETSEN, Carlson discovered that rhetorical sensitivity declined

with age among all nursing professionals. However, while most nurses tended to become rhetorical reflectors with time, supervising nurses tended to become noble selves communicatively. Interestingly, however, nurses who were more rhetorically sensitive also tended to enjoy being in a leadership position more than did nurses who were less rhetorically sensitive. But these results are inconclusive. Carlson noted that the tendency for nursing supervisors to become less rhetorically sensitive and more noble selves was not statistically significant. Nor did Carlson's study address the question of whether rhetorically sensitive supervisors are any more or less effective as supervisors than their non-rhetorically sensitive colleagues. Yet Carlson's study raises some interesting questions.

If we accept Carlson's discoveries about nursing supervisors as suggestive if not significant, we must wonder along with him whether the tendency away from rhetorical sensitivity toward noble selfness reflects the operation of situational factors. Given his finding that rhetorically sensitive nurses would like to serve in leadership positions, and assuming that they have the opportunity to do so, is the fact that most nursing supervisors tend to decrease in rhetorical sensitivity a result of demands of subordinates, superiors, or the medical environment in general? Do supervisors in other situations tend to be more or less rhetorically sensitive? And what are the consequences of supervisors' rhetorical sensitivity: Do subordinates and superiors perceive rhetorically sensitive supervisors to be more or less effective leaders than supervisors who are less rhetorically sensitive? This study will address these questions.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To the extend that supervisory leadership is implemented communica-

tively, Tannenbaum and Schmidt's classification of forces that influence the choice of a leadership style should also be useful in assessing supervisors' communicative styles. It seems likely that supervisors' communicative relationships with subordinates will reflect supervisors' preferences, subordinates' preferences, and the demands of the work setting, including upper managements' preferences. Thus, an analysis of the utility of rhetorically sensitive supervisory communication must consider each of these factors. The wisdom of addressing each of the factors is confirmed by speculating further about Carlson's findings.

Given the emphasis on adaptive invention within the concept of rhetorical sensitivity, one would expect that a rhetorically sensitive supervisor would successfully adapt to the demands of self, subordinates, and situation in practicing supervisory leadership. Yet Carlson found that nursing supervisors tended to be more noble selves than rhetorically sensitive. Why? It seems doubtful that these supervisors were simply following the dictates of their inner selves, given Carlson's finding that rhetorically sensitive nurses were more drawn to leadership positions that were noble self nurses. It is possible that the demands of the medical situation are such that subordinates and/or superiors exert pressure on supervisors to provide strong leadership. Indeed, Ward found that advice offered in management literature to supervisors in general counsels them more often to be manipulative than to be rhetorically sensitive.[10] It may also be that potential life and death situations in hospitals require more forceful leadership. Although a rhetorically sensitive supervisor should be able to adapt to such demands, the time that a rhetorically sensitive person would be likely to invest in communicative decision-making

might be perceived as indecisiveness. Thus, rhetorically sensitive supervisory communication might not be appropriate in an organizational setting such as nursing in which task is of paramount importance. The question is, does rhetorical sensitivity offer a useful approach to supervisory communication in any organizational setting?

In order to discover whether rhetorically sensitive supervisory communiction is practiced and useful, the following five research questions have been formulated on the basis of Tannenbaum and Schmidt's analysis of forces to be reckoned with in supervisory relationships:

1) Is there a relationship between supervisors' tendencies toward rhetorical sensitivity and subordinates' satisfaction with their supervision?

2) Is there a relationship between supervisors' tendencies toward rhetorical sensitivity and superiors' satisfaction with their supervision?

3) Are there differences in supervisors' tendencies toward rhetorical sensitivity in different organizational settings?

4) Are there differences in subordinates' satisfaction with more and less rhetorically sensitive supervisors in different organizational settings?

5) Are there differences in superiors' satisfaction with more and less rhetorically sensitive supervisors in different organizational settings?

Data Collection

Data were collected from first-line supervisors and their subordinates and superiors in three different organizational settings: two manufacturing plants, three libraries, and two hospital nursing departments.

Supervisors completed the RHETSEN scale (Appendix A) in small groups at their work sites. Reliability analysis indicated the scale was internally consistent (Cronbach's Alpha = .83, N = 56).[11] Demographic information was also collected regarding supervisors' ages, education, and spans of control, and supervisors were asked to rate their satisfaction with communication with their subordinates and with their jobs as supervisors (see items 41 and 42 of Appendix A).

Supervisors' subordinates completed the satisfaction with supervision sub-scale of the Job Descriptive Index (JDI-Supervision) developed by Smith, Kendall, and Hulin (Appendix B). Subordinates at the hospitals and libraries completed the scale in small groups at their work stations, but the size of the work force at the manufacturing plants dictated that the scales be distributed with letters of explanation, then returned in sealed envelopes to central collection points. Approximately 50% of the subordinates in each of manufacturing plants returned completed scales, while 100% of the employees asked to complete scales at the hospitals and libraries did so. Since Smith, Kendall, and Hulin have documented the validity of their scale,[12] and given the fact that the JDI is generally accepted as one of the better measures of employee satisfaction, no attempt was made to check the validity of the satisfaction with supervision sub-scale of the JDI. However, the reliability of the sub-scale was assessed in two ways. The internal consistency of the scale was assessed by computing a Cronbach's alpha figure of .88 (N = 373). However, it was feared that this fugure might be misleading since different

subordinates were rating their satisfaction with different supervisors. As Rosenshine has suggested in the educational setting, the larger question in such a circumstance is whether there is greater variance between groups of subordinates rating different supervisors than there is within groups of subordinates rating the same supervisor.[13] An analysis of variance computed to assess this further documented the reliability of the satisfaction with supervision sub-scale ($F = 5.74$, $df = 55,317$, $p<.001$).

Supervisors' superiors (managers) were asked to rate the effectiveness of supervisors' leadership using a typical performance appraisal item (Appendix C). The face validity of the item is suggested by the fact that the managers who completed the item concurred that it was similar to the performance appraisal items they regularly completed in their organizations. The reliability of the item is suggested by the fact that in all but two of the organizations involved, a single manager rated all of the first-line supervisors in the organization at the same time. The only exceptions were the manufacturing plants, in both of which one manager rated all but a few of the supervisors involved.

Data Analysis

The RHETSEN and JDI-Supervision scales were scored according to the procedures developed by their originators. As Hart, Carlson, and Eadie suggest, Rhetorical Sensitivity (RS), Noble Self (NS), and Rhetorical Reflector (RR) scores were computed for each supervisor who completed the RHETSEN scale. However, the Noble Self and Rhetorical Reflector scores were not used for critical statistical analyses because of multicolinearity problems, particularly

between RS and NS scores ($r=-.86$, $p<.001$). Superiors' ratings of their first-line supervisors were scored with Unacceptable = 0, Needs Improvement = 1, Acceptable = 2, Superior = 3, and Exceptional = 4.

The first and second research questions were examined by computing zero-order and partial correlation coefficients to describe and assess the strengths and directions of the relationships at issue. The third question was addressed by computing a one-way analysis of variance to assess the effect of organizational setting on rhetorical sensitivity. Question four was answered by computing an additional analysis of variance examining the effect of organizational setting on subordinates' satisfaction with supervision, and by computing zero-order correlation coefficients between supervisors' RS scores and their employees' mean JDI-Supervision score in each of the organizational settings. Question five was handled in a similar manner, with managers' ratings of supervisory leadership substituted for mean JDI-Supervision scores. In the case of both questions 4 and 5, small N's within individual organizational settings precluded computing meaningful partial correlation coefficients.

After the five research questions were addressed, multiple regression analysis was employed to investigate the overall relationship between the various factors being considered and employee satisfaction with supervision. An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests.

RESULTS

The primary question addressed in this study is whether, and under what conditions, rhetorical sensitivity is a useful way to think about supervisory communication. As Table 1 suggests, although rhetorically sensitive supervisors are somewhat unusual, they are generally well regarded, at least by their subordinates. However, the relationship between rhetorical sensitivity

and effective supervisory leadership is both variable and complex.

TABLE 1

RHETSEN DATA AND

CORRELATIONS ACROSS SITUATIONS

(N=56 Supervisors)

NORMATIVE INFORMATION	RS Score	NS Score	RR Score
Supervisors' Mean	30.2	14.3	8.0
National Mean[14]	31.8	15.1	7.0

Zero-Order Correlation Coefficients

RS Score	____	____	____	____	____	____
Subordinate Satisfaction	.24*	____	____	____	____	____
Managerial Rating	-.03	.18	____	____	____	____
Supervisor's Satisfaction with Communication	-.52**	.08	.14	____	____	____
Supervisor's Satisfaction with Position	-.40**	.13	.18	.67**	____	____
Supervisor's Age	-.44**	-.22	-.03	.27*	.13	____
Supervisor's Education	.43**	.34**	.25*	-.13	-.20	-.36**

*Significant at .05 level **Significant at .01 level

Compared to the national mean scores reported by Hart, Carlson, and Eadie, first-line supervisors who participated in this study scored higher as rhetorical reflectors than as rhetorical sensitives. Using the cut-off points suggested by Hart, Carlson, and Eadie, the hypothetically "typical" supervision in this study would be classified as a "classic" Rhetorical Reflector (RS<32, NS< 15, RR≥7). However, this varied according to work situation. The analysis of variance performed to answer research question three demonstrated that supervisors in different types of organizations were significantly different in levels of rhetorical sensitivity (see Table 2).

TABLE 2

LEVELS OF RHETORICAL SENSITIVITY AMONG

SUPERVISORS IN VARIOUS TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONS

Organization Type	Mean RS Score	N of Supervisors
Hospitals (Nursing)	33.0	15
Libraries	33.5	13
Manufacturing Plants	27.1	28

F=3.70
df=2,53
p<.05

In contrast to Carlson's findings, the "typical" nursing supervisor in this study (NS=13.2, RR=6.6) fit Hart, Carlson, and Eadie's definition of a "classic" rhetorical sensitive (RS≥32, NS<15, RR<7), although we will

see that such communicative tendencies were little appreciated by nursing subordinates or superiors. The "typical" library supervisor exceeded the cut-off points for both rhetorical sensitives and rhetorical reflectors (RR=8.9), while the "typical" manufacturing supervisor exceeded the cut-off points for both noble selves and rhetorical reflectors. But there were differences between production supervisors in different manufacturing plants. Supervisors in a non-union plant tended more toward being rhetorical reflectors (RS=27.8, NS=15.6, RR=8.5); supervisors in a unionized plant were more often noble selves (RS=26.1, NS=18.0, RR=8.1).

The relationship between rhetorically sensitive communication and effective supervisory leadership is made complex by several moderator variables. As reported in Table 1, zero-order correlation coefficients document a small but statistically significant positive relationship between supervisors' RS scores and subordinates' satisfaction with their supervisors (as indicated by mean JDI-Supervision scores for each supervisor). However, this relationship becomes smaller and no longer statistically significant ($r=.18, p=.10$) when the effects of managers' ratings of supervisors, supervisors' satisfaction with their positions, supervisors' ages, and supervisors' educational levels are partialled out. Inspection of first-order partial coefficients reveals that managers' ratings and supervisors' satisfaction with their positions and with their communication with subordinates act as suppressor variables, while age and education tend to inflate the relationship between supervisors' rhetorical sensitivity and subordinates' satisfaction with their supervisors. In light of the second research question, it is important to note that managers' ratings of supervisors' leadership effectiveness were not significantly related with any variable except supervisors' educational level. It is

particularly interesting to note that there was not a significant relationship between managers' ratings of supervisors' leadership effectiveness and subordinates' satisfaction with their supervisors, either across situations or in any individual situation except nursing, where subordinate satisfaction, managerial rating, and supervisors' educational level were so strongly interrelated as to suggest multicollinearity (zero-order coefficients all exceed .5, significant at .03 level). Given the fact that the reliability of the JDI-Supervision scale is demonstrated while the reliability of the manager's rating item is largely assumed, it seems wiser to regard the JDI-Supervision scores as the more credible indicators of supervisory effectiveness.[15]

If managers' ratings of supervisors' effectiveness as leaders act weakly to suppress the relationship between rhetorically sensitive communication and subordinates' satisfaction with their supervisors, supervisors' satisfaction with their positions and with their communication with subordinates act strongly to mask that relationship. As Table I indicates, supervisors' satisfaction with their positions and with their communication with subordinates are so strongly related as to be judged multicollinear. It is arguable whether this condition exists because of questionnaire design or because supervisors perceive their jobs primarily in terms of communicating with subordinates. What is demonstrable is that supervisors' satisfaction with both their positions and with their communication with subordinates are both strongly and negatively associated with higher RS scores. Treating the two supervisor satisfaction variables as multicollinear, the strength of the relationship between supervisors' RS scores and subordinates' satisfaction with supervisors jumps to .32 ($p<.01$) when just the effect of supervisors' satisfaction with their positions is partialled out. No doubt subordinates are more satisfied with

supervisors who like their jobs. The question is, can supervisors be trained to be satisfied with rhetorically sensitive communication with their subordinates?

This study confirmed Carlson's discovery that rhetorical sensitivity tends to increase with education and decrease with age.[16] In the present study supervisors' years of education correlated positively and significantly with higher RS scores, and supervisors' ages were significantly associated with RS scores in a negative direction. Equally important, subordinate satisfaction scores across situations were positively related to supervisors' educational levels and negatively related to supervisors' ages, although in the latter case the relationship was not quite statistically significant ($p=.051$). Subordinates' overall preferences in supervisors were clear: They generally preferred younger, better educated supervisors who tended to be rhetorically sensitive. What is not clear is whether subordinates preferred such supervisors because they were young, well educated, or rhetorically sensitive, although multiple regression analysis indicated that of the three RS score was marginally the best predictor of subordinates' satisfaction with supervision (beta=.22, compared to a beta of -.21 for education and a beta of -.05 for age).[17] However, subordinates' preferences regarding supervision varied from situation to situation.

The analysis of variance computed to answer research question three also provided a partial answer to question four: Supervisors in different organizational setting have significantly different levels of rhetorical sensitivity (see Table 2). An additional analysis of variance provided another part of the answer to question four: Subordinates in different organizational settings vary significantly in their satisfaction with supervision (see Table 3). The suspicions raised by the massive F-value in the

the second analysis of variance were confirmed by a multiple regression analysis including organization types as dummy variables: The type of organization is the best predictor of subordinates' satisfaction with supervision, especially in the case of workers in manufacturing plants (beta=-.64). But the clearest answer to question four can be found in the correlation coefficients for different work situations reported in Table 4.

TABLE 3

LEVELS OF SATISFACTION WITH SUPERVISION

AMONG SUBORDINATES IN VARIOUS TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONS

Organization Type	Mean JDI-Supervision Score	N of Subordinates
Hospitals	44.6	105
Libraries	44.8	64
Manufacturing Plants	36.5*	204

F=22.93
df=2,370
p<.0001

*Significantly different level of satisfaction from other organization types according to Tukey's HSD procedure (p<.05).

TABLE 4

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN RS SCORES

AND JDI-SUPERVISION SCORES WITHIN SITUATIONS

Work Situation	Mean RS Score	Mean JDI-Supervision Score [18]	Zero-Order Correlation Between RS And JDI-Supervision Scores
Hospital (Nursing)	33.0	45.1	-.07
Library	33.5	46.9	.09
Unionized Manufacturing	26.1	35.9	-.58*
Non-Unionized Manufacturing	27.8	38.1	.46*

*Significant at .05 level.

Table 4 represents a change in the treatment of the organizational setting as a situational variable. To this point organizational setting has been defined in terms of types of organizations — hospitals, libraries, and manufacturing plants. In Table 4 the category of manufacturing plants has been split into unionized and non-unionized manufacturing plants. This redefinition of organizational setting is defensible in the sense that it does not lose important information: A one-way analysis of variance of average JDI-Supervision scores in work situations as newly defined was highly significant ($F=4.56$, $df=3,52$, $p<.01$). A one-way analysis of variance of supervisors' RS scores in work situations was nearly significant ($F=2.52$, $df=3,52$, $p=.07$). Further, this refining of the concept of organizational setting yields an important insight into the situational relationship between rhetorically sensitive communication and subordinates' satisfaction with supervision.

When arrangements were made for data for this study to be collected at the two manufacturing plants, officials at both plants expressed an interest in seeing how they "stacked up" against each other. It was an interesting question, since one plant was unionized and the other was not. Further, there were other differences between the two plants as working environments. The non-unionized plant was known throughout the community as a progressive organization — a good place to work. During an interview the president of that plant commented that there were no "hard and fast" organizational rules regarding employee behavior. He cited as proof an example of an employee not being docked for regularly arriving late at work, and added that he recognized that such a policy made it tough on supervisors, but that such a policy was necessary in an organization that valued people over products. In contrast, the unionized plant had a good reputation for labor relations, but the personnel director and production manager of that plant agreed that the very nature of a union shop made for fixed rules for supervisor-subordinate interactions. As Table 4 indicates, the differences in these two manufacturing plants are reflected in the relationship between supervisors' RS scores and subordinates' satisfaction with supervision.

Unlike the library and hospital settings, where there were no significant relationships between RS scores and mean JDI-Supervision scores, there were significant relationships between the two measures in both of the production plants. What differed was the direction of the relationships. Workers in the non-union shop preferred that their supervisors be rhetorically sensitive, young, and educated. Workers in the unionized plant preferred that their supervisors be older, less educated, and less rhetorically sensitive. Although

the problem of multicollinearity between the RS and RR scores ($r=-.74$, $p<.01$) makes drawing conclusions difficult in the union shop, it is interesting to note that in that setting higher RR scores were strongly related with increased subordinate satisfaction with supervision ($r=.70, p<.01$).

In the nursing situation subordinate satisfaction with supervision was significantly related only with supervisors' educational levels ($r=.54$, $p<.05$) and managers' ratings of supervisors ($r=.56, p<.05$). Managers' ratings of supervisors were also significantly related with supervisors' educational levels ($r=.52$, $p<.05$). One interpretation of such a finding is that in the nursing situation the primary determinant of supervisory effectiveness from both the subordinate and the managerial viewpoint is whether a nursing supervisor has the necessary training to successfully complete the task at hand. In the library situation subordinate satisfaction with supervision was not significantly related with any variable in this study.

Research question number five failed to yield much important information regarding the situational relationship between rhetorical sensitivity and supervisory effectiveness as measured by managers' ratings of supervisors' leadership. Analyses of variance of managers' ratings of supervisors by organization type and by work situation failed to produce significant results. Nor were managers' ratings of supervisors significantly related to supervisors' RS scores in any of the work situations. In fact, managers' ratings of supervisors were significantly related only with supervisors' educational level in the non-union manufacturing plant ($r=.57$, $p<.01$), with high RR scores in the union manufacturing plant ($r=.55$, $p<.05$) and in the nursing situation ($r=.52$, $p<.05$), with subordinate satisfaction and supervisors' education in the nursing situation, and with supervisors' satisfaction with their communication with subordinates in the library situation ($r=.49$, $p<.05$).

CONCLUSIONS

At the end of their report on the successful development of an instrument to measure rhetorical sensitivity, Hart, Carlson, and Eadie identify six different issues that can be addressed through research using the RHETSEN scale. At the pragmatic level, the authors pose the question: "Does the everyday business environment reward rhetorically sensitive workers or are Noble Selves or Rhetorical Reflectors typically favored?"[19] This study offers a situational answer to that question.

Data collected and analyzed in response to the first research question indicated that was a significant, positive overall relationship between supervisors' tendencies toward rhetorical sensitivity and subordinates' satisfaction with their supervisors. Data collected and analyzed in response to question two failed to indicate a significant overall relationship between supervisors' tendencies toward rhetorical sensitivity and managers' satisfaction with supervisors' supervision. Question five was equally non-productive: There were no significant relationships between supervisors' RS scores and managers' ratings of supervisors in individual organizational settings. However, data analysis associated with questions three and four clarified the situational utility of rhetorically sensitive communication between first-line supervisors and their subordinates.

Analyses of variance computed to answer questions three and four indicated that there were significant differences in different organizational settings in both supervisors' tendencies toward rhetorical sensitivity and in subordinates' satisfaction with their supervisors. Correlational analyses

of the relationships between supervisors' RS scores and mean JDI-Supervision scores in different organizational settings revealed that rhetorical sensitivity can be variously helpful, harmful, or irrelevant to subordinates' satisfaction with their supervisor. It is the situational nature of this relationship which demands comment.

Rhetorical sensitivity was positively associated with subordinate satisfaction with supervision only in a manufacturing organization where the managerial climate emphasized responsiveness to the viewpoints of employees and a rejection of rules-governed supervision. Rhetorical sensitivity was negatively associated with subordinate satisfaction with supervision in a unionized manufacturing plant where the relationship between supervisor and subordinates was in part dictated by a rigid union contract. In that setting subordinates preferred supervisors who were rhetorical reflectors, perhaps because these supervisors were older men who had come over time to know the particular needs and expectations of their subordinates. But the greatest insight into the situational utility of rhetorical sensitivity may come in the nursing situation, where rhetorical sensitivity was simply irrelevant to subordinates' satisfaction with their supervisors.

It can be argued that in manufacturing plants the routinized nature of the tasks performed causes them to fade into the background to the point where the quality of supervisors' communicative relationships with subordinates plays an important role in determining how satisfied or dissatisfied subordinates are with their supervisors. In contrast, although nursing tasks are frequently routine, there is an underlying urgency about tasks in a hospital environment. Thus, nurses might be expected to care more about their supervisors' medical skills than about the quality of communicative relationships with their super-

visors. Further, the fact that the potential utility of rhetorical sensitivity in supervisory communication is strongly influenced by organizational setting has implications for the essential concept of rhetorical sensitivity.

Hart and Burks described rhetorical sensitivity as making "effective social interaction manifestly possible." "Social" is a broad term; Hart and Burks listed as legitimate goals for such interactions both achieving "practical gain" and strengthening "an interpersonal bond."[20] But there is a concern throughout Hart and Burks' essay with building effective communicative relationships. Their concern with relational communication results in a subtle recasting of the traditional rhetorical concept of "situation." Although Hart and Burks acknowledge the need for communicators to act with regard to "situation or context" and to deal with "situational changes," they justify their call for rhetorical invention in part because of "the situational changes that occur in others as a result of social intercourse."[21] Thus, Hart and Burk's treatment of situation is more fluid than usual. To the extent that the characteristics of the other communicator(s) become more important to a speaker's rhetorical choices than the characteristics of a particular situation, one could argue that the relationship between communicators subsumes the communicative situation. If this is true, it should come as no surprise that the concept of rhetorical sensitivity may help or hurt a supervisor's effectiveness with subordinates in an organizational setting where communicative relationships between supervisors and subordinates are an important concern, while rhetorical sensitivity has little influence on a supervisor's effectiveness with subordinates in an organizational setting where communicative relationships between supervisors and subordinates are at best a secondary concern. In that respect it is important to remember that organizational setting was

the best predictor of subordinates' satisfaction with their supervisors, and that subordinates working in libraries and as nurses in hospitals were significantly more satisfied with their supervisors than were subordinates working in either a unionized or non-unionized manufacturing plant. The prospect of completing a meaningful task in a library or hospital nursing situation may make the quality of communicative relationships between supervisors and subordinates relatively less important.

It is clear from this study that the potential utility of the concept of rhetorical sensitivity in supervisory communication is in large part determined by organizational situation. Indeed, the fact that rhetorically sensitive supervisors were preferred by subordinates only in a progressive organization especially conducive to such an approach to supervisory communication can be construed as supporting the contention that organizational climate predates specific communication behaviors.[22] In this respect it is worth noting that supervisors in the progressive, non-union shop had a higher average RS score than supervisors in the rule-bound unionized plant. But a clear distinction must be drawn between the potential utility of rhetorical sensitivity to supervisors in various organizational settings and the actual presence of rhetorically sensitive attitudes toward communication among those supervisors. The fact is, the highest average RS scores were recorded by supervisors in the library and hospital nursing organizational settings, even though supervisors' rhetorical sensitivity was statistically irrelevant to subordinates' and superiors' positive assessment of supervisors in those settings. But library and nursing supervisors' higher RS scores can be easily explained. This study confirmed earlier findings that rhetorical

sensitivity is positively related to education and negatively related to age. The simple fact is that library and nursing supervisors were both younger and better educated than their counterparts in manufacturing plants. The typical manufacturing plant supervisor was in his mid-forties and had a high school education. The typical nursing supervisor was 35 and had completed three years of education beyond high school. Library supervisors averaged 38 years of age and nearly five years of education beyond high school. Thus, one would expect library and nursing supervisors to be "naturally" more rhetorically sensitive than manufacturing supervisors. The question is, can supervisors who are not normally inclined toward rhetorical sensitivity be trained to approach supervisory communication in a rhetorically sensitive manner in organizational settings where such an approach is potentially useful? Further, can supervisors be educated to be more personally satisfied when their communication with subordinates reflects a rhetorically sensitive frame of mind?

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study must be regarded as only a preliminary investigation into the possibly useful application of the concept of rhetorical sensitivity to supervisory communication. Among other things, it is flawed by a questionable measurement of supervisors' leadership effectiveness by superiors. However, the findings of the study do suggest some potentially valuable future research. Clearly, the results of this study confirm the wisdom of Jablin's call for a contingency approach to research regarding effective supervisor-subordinate communication. Additional studies might usefully investigate the relationship

between rhetorical sensitivity and effective supervision in different organizational settings. An important work environment neglected in this study is a classic white collar situation, particularly in a business organization. Libraries were included in this study to serve as representative white collar organizations, but I am not certain whether library work is really typical of most white collar jobs. In any case the data collected in the libraries was not very informative. Of course, other studies might also include organizational settings included in this study. Such additional and replicative studies might help determine the merit of this study's speculations about the special sense of communicative situation implicit in the concept of rhetorical sensitivity, and might help clarify the nature and extent of a contingent relationship between subordinates' perceptions of tasks and communicative relationships with supervisors, assuming that such a relationship exists. Such studies might also help clarify the relationship between organizational climate and the quality of supervisors' communicative relationships with subordinates, as observed in the manufacturing plants in this study. But most important, such studies might identify specific organizational situations where a rhetorically sensitive approach to communication might help a first-line supervisor to lead subordinates more effectively. For only when we are certain that a rhetorically sensitive attitute toward communication is potentially beneficial to supervisors' communicative relationships with subordinates in specific organizational settings should we begin to devise ways to educate those supervisors to become more rhetorically sensitive.

NOTES

[1]Roderick P. Hart and Don M. Burks, "Rhetorical Sensitivity and Social Interaction," Speech Monographs, 39 (June, 1972), 75.

[2]See, for example, Morris S. Viteles, Motivation and Morale in Industry (New York: W.W. Norton, 1953), 161, Arnold S. Tannenbaum, Social Psychology of the Work Organization (Belmont, Ca.: Brooks/Cole, 1966), 75-77, and Bernard P. Indik, Basil S. Georgopoulos, and Stanley E. Seashore, "Superior-Subordinate Relationships and Performance," Personnel Psychology, 14 (1964), 372.

[3]See, for example, Donald C. Pelz, "Influence: A Key to Effective Leadership in the First-Line Supervisor", Personnel, 29 (1952), 209, William E. Fulmer, "The Making of a Supervisor 1977," Personnel Journal, 56 (1977), 141, and Willard E. Parker, Robert W. Kleemeier, and Beverly V. Parker, Front-Line Leadership (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), 98.

[4]Robert Tannenbaum and Warren H. Schmidt, "How to Choose a Leadership Pattern," Harvard Business Review, 36, No. 2 (Mar.-Apr. 1958), 101.

[5]Fred E. Fiedler, A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), Paul R. Lawrence and Jay W. Lorsch, Organization and Environment (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), Paul Hersey and Kenneth M. Blanchard, Management of Organizational Behavior: Utilizing Human Resources (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969).

[6]Fredric M. Jablin, "Superior-Subordinate Communication: The State of the Art," Psychological Bulletin, 86 (Nov. 1979), 1215.

[7]Fredric M. Jablin, "Applying Theory and Research in Superior-Subordinate Communication: Realizing the Limits of Wishful Thinking," paper presented at the Speech Communication Association convention in New York, 1980, p. 9.

[8]Hart and Burks, p. 81.

[9]Robert E. Carlson, "Rhetorical Sensitivity: Theoretical Perspective, Measurement, and Implications in an Interpersonal and Organizational Context," Diss. Purdue University 1978. See especially pp. 89, 98-107, 113, and 136 for discussion of his findings. See also Roderick P. Hart, Robert E. Carlson, and William F. Eadie, "Attitudes Toward Communication and the Assessment of Rhetorical Sensitivity," Communication Monographs, 47 (March, 1980), 20-21 and Robert E. Carlson, "Rhetorical Sensitivity and the Nursing Profession," paper presented at the Central States Speech Communication Association convention in Chicago, Illinois, 1980, pp. 6-8, 12 for additional discussion of Carlson's findings regarding rhetorical sensitivity among supervisory nurses.

[10]Steven A. Ward, "Rhetorical Sensitivity in First-Line Supervisory Relationships: A Descriptive and Critical Investigation of Management Literature," Diss. Pennsylvania State University 1978, pp. 104-106.

[11]See Hart, Carlson, and Eadie, pp. 5-12 for a discussion of the reliability and validity of the RHETSEN scale.

[12]Patricia C. Smith, Lorne M. Kendall, and Charles L. Hulin, The Measurement of Satisfaction in Work and Retirement (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969), pp. 37-79.

[13]Barak Rosenshine, Teaching Behaviours and Student Achievement (Berks: National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales, 1971), p. 21.

[14]Hart, Carlson, and Eadie, p. 8.

[15]Of course, it can be argued that managers and subordinates see effective first-line supervisory leadership differently. If that line of argument is accepted, it is interesting to note higher Rhetorical Reflector scores were positively and significantly associated with higher managerial ratings of effective supervisory leadership ($r=.26$, $p<.05$). This was particularly true in the union manufacturing plant ($r=.55$, $p<.05$) and in the nursing situation ($r=.52$, $p<.05$).

[16]Carlson, "Rhetorical Sensitivity and the Nursing Profession," pp. 6-13. See also "Rhetorical Sensitivity: Theoretical Perspective, Measurement, and Implications in an Interpersonal and Organizational Context," pp. 89, 98, 100-101.

[17]The difference in the signs of the educational level correlation and beta coeffecients results from including dummy variables representing organizational types in the multiple regression analysis. In fact, the relationship between supervisors' education levels and subordinates' satisfaction with their supervisors was positive in the non-union manufacturing plant and the hospitals, and negative in the unionized manufacturing plant and the libraries.

[18]Mean JDI-Supervision Scores reported in Table 4 for hospitals and libraries differ from the scores reported for those organizational types in Table 3 because of differences in the way the scores were computed. Table 3 scores represent the means of all employee JDI-Supervision scores in the various organizational types. Mean JDI-Supervision scores in Table 4 were computed on the basis of mean JDI-Supervision scores derived for

each supervisor in order to calculate correlation coefficients between RS and JDI-Supervision scores. As "means of means," the mean JDI-Supervision scores reported for hospitals and libraries in Table 4 are probably less accurate than the scores reported for those organizational types in Table 3.

[19]Hart, Carlson, and Eadie, p. 22.

[20]Hart and Burks, p. 90.

[21]Ibid., pp. 79, 82, 85.

[22]cf W.C. Redding, Communicating Within the Organization (New York; Industrial Communication Council and Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue Research Foundation, 1973).

Appendix A
RHETSEN Scale

Name _____

Age _____

Education _____

INSTRUCTIONS: Listed below are a number of statements about communication to which we would like your reactions. Please respond to each statement individually and be assured that there are no absolutely right or absolutely wrong answers. For each statement, please circle the letter that indicates your opinion.

Almost Always True	Frequently True	Sometimes True	Infrequently True	Almost Never True	
A	B	C	D	E	1. People should be frank and spontaneous in conversation.
A	B	C	D	E	2. An idea can be communicated in many different ways.
A	B	C	D	E	3. When talking with someone with whom you disagree, you should feel obligated to state your opinion.
A	B	C	D	E	4. A person should laugh at an unfunny joke just to please the joke-teller.
A	B	C	D	E	5. It's good to follow the rule: before blowing your top at someone, sleep on the problem.
A	B	C	D	E	6. When talking to others, you should drop all of your defenses.
A	B	C	D	E	7. It is best to hide one's true feelings in order to avoid hurting others.
A	B	C	D	E	8. No matter how hard you try, you just can't make friends with everyone.
A	B	C	D	E	9. One should keep quiet rather than say something which will alienate others.
A	B	C	D	E	10. You should share your joys with your closest friends.
A	B	C	D	E	11. It is acceptable to discuss religion with a stranger.
A	B	C	D	E	12. A supervisor in a work situation must be forceful with subordinates to be effective.
A	B	C	D	E	13. A person should tell it like it is.
A	B	C	D	E	14. "Look before you leap" is the most important rule to follow when talking to others.
A	B	C	D	E	15. You should tell friends if you think they are making a mistake.
A	B	C	D	E	16. The first thing that comes to mind is the best thing to say.
A	B	C	D	E	17. When conversing, you should tell others what they want to hear.
A	B	C	D	E	18. When someone dominates the conversation, it's important to interrupt them in order to state your opinion.
A	B	C	D	E	19. When angry, a person should say nothing rather than say something he or she will be sorry for later.

Almost Always True	Frequently True	Sometimes True	Infrequently True	Almost Never True		
A	B	C	D	E	20.	When someone has an irritating habit, he or she should be told about it.
A	B	C	D	E	21.	When talking to your friends, you should adjust your remarks to suit them.
A	B	C	D	E	22.	You really can't put sugar coating on bad news.
A	B	C	D	E	23.	A person who speaks his or her gut feelings is to be admired.
A	B	C	D	E	24.	You shouldn't make a scene in a restaurant by arguing with a waiter.
A	B	C	D	E	25.	Putting thoughts into words just the way you want them is a difficult process.
A	B	C	D	E	26.	A friend who has bad breath should be told about it.
A	B	C	D	E	27.	If you're sure you're right, you should argue with a person who disagrees with you.
A	B	C	D	E	28.	If people would open up to each other the world would be better off.
A	B	C	D	E	29.	There is a difference between someone who is "diplomatic" and one who is "two-faced."
A	B	C	D	E	30.	You should tell someone if you think they are about to embarrass themselves.
A	B	C	D	E	31.	One should not be afraid to voice his or her opinion.
A	B	C	D	E	32.	If your boss doesn't like you, there's not much you can do about it.
A	B	C	D	E	33.	You should tell someone if you think they are giving you bad advice.
A	B	C	D	E	34.	Saying what you think is a sign of friendship.
A	B	C	D	E	35.	When you're sure you're right, you should press your point until you win the argument.
A	B	C	D	E	36.	"If you feel it, say it" is a good rule to follow in conversation.
A	B	C	D	E	37.	If a man cheats on his wife, he should tell her.
A	B	C	D	E	38.	It is better to speak your gut feelings than to beat around the bush.
A	B	C	D	E	39.	We should have a kind word for the people we meet in life.
A	B	C	D	E	40.	One should treat all people in the same way.

A = Almost Always True
B = Frequently True
C = Sometimes True
D = Infrequently True
E = Almost Never True

OPTIONAL: If you are willing, please share the following personal information.

A B C D E 41. I am satisfied with my communication with my employees.

A B C D E 42. I am satisfied with my job as a supervisor.

Name of your Immediate Supervisor: _____

Your Age: _____

Appendix B
Job Descriptive Index
Satisfaction with Supervision Sub-Scale

INSTRUCTIONS:
For each of the following items, put "yes" if the item describes your immediate supervisor, "no" if it does not, and "?" if you cannot decide.

_____ Asks my advice

_____ Hard to please

_____ Impolite

_____ Praises good work

_____ Tactful

_____ Influential

_____ Up-to-date

_____ Doesn't supervise enough

_____ Quick tempered

_____ Tells me where I stand

_____ Annoying

_____ Stubborn

_____ Knows job well

_____ Bad

_____ Intelligent

_____ Leaves me on my own

_____ Lazy

_____ Around when needed

Appendix C
Manager's Rating Form

Please use the scale below to rate the leadership effectiveness of _____.

Unacceptable Needs Improvement Acceptable Superior Exceptional

Please use the scale below to rate the leadership effectiveness of _____.

Unacceptable Needs Improvement Acceptable Superior Exceptional

Please use the scale below to rate the leadership effectiveness of _____.

Unacceptable Needs Improvement Acceptable Superior Exception